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ABSTRACT

A project was conducted in New York State to promote enrollment of handicapped adults in continuing education programs. Through the efforts of twenty-one specially hired "facilitators," who encouraged the handicapped to enroll, eased them through registration, and attended classes with them, 125 handicapped adults participated in fifty different continuing education courses in five school districts during the Fall 1979, and Spring 1980, semesters. After the courses ended, a telephone survey was conducted of forty-five randomly-selected, non-handicapped students who had attended classes with the handicapped students. Responses indicated that a great majority (87 percent) of the people questioned experienced positive reactions to the presence of handicapped adults in their classes. (It should be noted, however, that the desire to give a socially acceptable response may have been involved in this result, since interviewees knew their names were known and they were replying to personal questioning, rather than filling out an anonymous questionnaire.) Some of the factors which seemed to have contributed to the success of integrating handicapped adults in regular continuing education courses were including facilitators as part of the classroom activities and enrolling handicapped students in small classes. (KC)

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Attitudes of Non-Disabled Students Toward Developmentally Disabled Students In Adult Continuing Education Programs

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Background and Introduction

In Spring, 1979, the Capital Area School Development Association (CASDA) received a $50,000 grant from HEA Title I funds to fund the project "Continuing Education Programs for 200 Handicapped Adults in Communities of the Capital District Area of New York State".

The intent of the project was to stimulate the enrollment of handicapped adults in regular continuing education courses over two semesters, Fall 1979 and Spring 1980. The school districts contacted and cooperating were Albany, Schenectady, Watervliet, North Colonie, Guilderland, and East Greenbush. One-hundred twenty-five handicapped adults were enrolled in 50 different regular continuing education courses.

As part of the project, 21 persons were hired to contact school districts and various residences for handicapped adults. These "facilitators" aided students in enrollment, transportation and classroom activities throughout the two semesters. Training for the facilitators was provided at the beginning of the project. Throughout the two semesters, meetings were conducted to deal with problems as they occurred. For the most part, facilitators had little professional expertise or experience in working with handicapped before joining this staff.

As part of the evaluation of the project, a questionnaire was designed which looked at facilitator opinions regarding the positive and negative results of each handicapped adults' experience. That is, each facilitator answered a series of questions pertaining to each of the adults for whom he/she was responsible. Each facilitator was responsible for one to six adults. A report was written each semester reflecting the information on these questionnaires.

An additional evaluation was organized and conducted in the Summer of 1980. No information could be found in the literature regarding the attitudes of non-handicapped adults toward handicapped adults. Thus, a follow-up study of the opinions and reactions of non-handicapped adults enrolled in the Spring Semester Continuing Education classes was planned and conducted.

Lists of non-handicapped students enrolled in the various classes attended by handicapped students were obtained from school administrators and directors of continuing education. Complete class lists were received from all but one school district. One district administrator provided the class roster from only one of the courses handicapped students attended.

A telephone interview format was designed to look at the reactions of non-handicapped students to participating in Spring 1980 courses with handicapped adults. Following the construction of the interview format, it was tested and revised. The final format included a series of questions but little importance was given to following the order of the questionnaire. Information was often obtained outside the given format, in informal conversation. A copy of the format containing the questions constitutes Appendix A.

The survey was composed of fourteen questions. In addition, space was provided for verbatum comments. Some of the topics of most interest were:

1) What were the reactions of non-handicapped students to the presence of handicapped adults in the classes?
2) What was the effect of facilitators in class?
3) Did the handicapped adults interfere with non-handicapped students' learning?
4) What changes in attitude of non-handicapped adults, if any, resulted from this experience?

The goal was to look at the impact of this program by surveying a sample of non-handicapped students from each class. Forty-five students from 22 classes were contacted for interviews. In one class we were unable to contact any students and in one school district, only one class list was provided. We attempted to speak with two students from each class. In two classes three students were contacted. In one of these, it was thought best to speak with a third person due to the larger size of the class (approximately 30). In the other, two persons demonstrated some difficulty understanding English, and it was thought best to speak with a third student.

The following responses to each of the 14 questions presented to 45 enrolled students answer the four major questions.

Results

1) Were you aware that a handicapped person (or persons) was in class?

Yes	No
42	3

Forty-two students responded that they were aware that handicapped people were in class with them. Three said they were not aware. Of these three, one woman said she was not aware until she was interviewed, another said she hadn't been aware until the third week of her class, and another said she became aware only through recognition of the facilitator.

2) What was your reaction to his/her participation?

Positive	Mixed	Negative	No Opinion
39	4	0	2

Thirty-nine students described their reactions to handicapped students as positive. Responses here included persons saying "I didn't mind" or "It doesn't bother me", as well as "It was great to have them there". Four individuals said they had mixed feelings. One described himself as "experiencing acute discomfort and resentment" at first, another said his initial reaction

was "surprise". One student said he was "rather patronizing at first". There were two students who had no opinion.

3) What were the reactions of other class members?

Positive	Mixed	Negative	No Opinion
32	9	0	4

Thirty-two students thought that other class members reacted positively to the handicapped students. "No one seemed to mind them being there" was one comment. Another was "everyone thought it was great". Nine individuals said there were mixed feelings among class members. One man said "Everyone was rather patronizing". Another student said it "took a while to get used to it".

4) Were you aware there was a person present to assist the handicapped student?

Yes	No	Unsure
40	4	1

Forty students said they were aware that there was someone present to assist the handicapped adults. Four students were not aware. One individual was unsure he was remembering the correct person as being the facilitator.

5) Was there a positive difference when this facilitator was present?

Yes	Mixed	No	No Opinion
26	5	2	12

Twenty-six students thought the presence of the facilitator was beneficial. One student described an incident in which a handicapped student had a seizure and "the facilitator was very helpful". Another remarked on the "calm and helpful" attitude the facilitator demonstrated. Another comment referred to the facilitator providing the non-handicapped students with a sense of

"confidence in case of emergency". Five individuals thought the facilitator was sometimes beneficial. Two responded that the presence of a facilitator was not positive. One response was "the facilitator created an artificial barrier between the handicapped and non-handicapped" students. Another said that the "changes in facilitator during the semester (in her particular class) caused confusion". Twelve students had no opinion.

6) Have you had previous contact with handicapped adults?

Yes	No	Unsure
20	23	2

Twenty students reported previous contact with handicapped students. Twenty-three said they had no contact before this experience. Two students were unsure. One individual said "This was my first experience with these people. I was pleasantly surprised".

7) Were the handicapped students able to achieve the course objectives?

Yes	Sometimes	No	No Opinion
25	10	8	2

Twenty-five students thought that the handicapped students were able to achieve the course objectives. At least two students said that "small class size and individualized help" helped the handicapped students. One comment was "Our only goal was to have a good time, and they (the handicapped students) seemed to be enjoying themselves". Ten students said that the handicapped adults were sometimes able to achieve course objectives. For instance, with regard to a class in disco dancing, one woman said handicapped students "did not learn all steps, but they all had fun". Eight individuals said that the handicapped students in their classes were unable to achieve course objectives. One student said "I didn't think they came to all the classes", and another said, "I didn't think they were able to grasp what was

going on". while two students said that: "They didn't have the same objectives as the rest of the class, but they did well". Two students had no opinion.

8) Did the handicapped students interfere with others' participation?

Yes	Sometimes	No
0	2	43

Forty-three students said that the handicapped students did not interfere with others' participation. Two students said that there was sometimes an interference. Both students referred to classes in physical education, and in particular to volleyball and basketball games. One man siad "I have played basketball with the same group for five years and this was a real addition. It did cause a change in our style". Another student described the players as more "indifferent" to the handicapped students as games became more competitive and members want to "play seriously".

9) Should handicapped students be in regular continuing education classes?

Yes	Sometimes	No
42	2	1

Forty-two students said that handicapped students should be enrolled in regular continuing education classes. One woman said "They benefit from being in contact with others that encourage them". At least five individuals said that handicapped people "have the right" to be in all classes. Two individuals said that handicapped students should be in regular classes sometimes. Both responses referred to handicapped persons being "overwhelmed or unduly frustrated" in regular classes. One student said they should not be in regular classes because "it would hold faster students back". However, it should be noted in this case that the respondent did not say she was held back by handicapped students in her class.

10) Should handicapped students be in special classes?

Yes	Sometimes	No
1	25	19

One individual said handicapped students should be in special classes. Twenty-five said they should be in special classes sometimes. At least ten of these responses cited the "nature of the class and the degree of handicap" as the deciding factors in placement of a handicapped person in a regular or special class. Nineteen individuals said that handicapped students should not be in special classes.

11) Did the experience change your thoughts about handicapped people living in the community?

Yes	No	No Opinion
6	26	13

When asked whether this experience had changed thoughts about handicapped people living in the community, six students reported a change. All six described a positive change in general attitude toward and awareness of handicapped people. A typical comment was "I never realized there were so many different types of or degrees of handicap. Sometimes you just think of the worst". One man said, "This experience made me more patient and aware". Twenty-six individuals reported no change in attitude. At least half of these individuals indicated a positive response toward students with handicapping conditions prior to this experience. No one described himself as being unaccepting of handicapped people before this experience. Thirteen individuals said they had no opinion.

12) Should handicapped adults live in the community?

Yes	No	No Opinion
39	2	4

Thirty-nine students said handicapped people should live in the community. Only two people said they should not live in the community. One negative respondent said it would be "to their benefit" to live with others like themselves. Four people had no opinion.

13) Should handicapped students live in institutions?

Yes	Sometimes	No	No Opinion
2	18	24	1

Two students said handicapped people should live in institutions. Eighteen said sometimes institutions would be best. At least three people suggested this decision should be up to a doctor and dependent upon the kinds of needs a handicapped person might have. Twenty-four students said that handicapped people should not live in institutions. At least three responses were severely critical of reputed "indifference" found in institutions, and preferred community residences. One person had no opinion.

14) Should handicapped students be more active in community activities?

Yes	Sometimes	No	No Opinion
40	4	1	1

Forty students said that handicapped people should be more active in community activities. Four said that sometimes they should be more active, depending upon the activity and the handicapped persons desires to become involved. One person did not think handicapped people should be more active, and one person had no opinion.

Summary

It would seem that a majority, 39 of the 45 people questioned or 87%, experienced positive reactions to the presence of handicapped adults in their classes. It must be noted that responses such as "I don't mind" or "It didn't bother me" were interpreted as positive. Approximately 13 of the

39 positive responses demonstrated such an off-hand acceptance of the handicapped students. Such responses might be said to reflect a neutral attitude towards the handicapped adults. They might also be seen as reflecting a negative attitude couched in positive terms, as though respondents were expecting questions to seek out their negative thoughts and were monitering their answers. Examples of this occurred when students asked "Do you mean, did I mind them being there?" and continued to say they did not mind. Even respondents with mixed feelings were careful to say "I was ashamed of the way I reacted" or "my opinion changed over time".

The questionnaire may have elicited socially appropriate responses from students for several reasons. Respondents were aware that their names were known, respondents were responding to and interacting with another person rather than answering questions presented on a piece of paper, respondents were referring to an experience which had occurred several months earlier, and respondents were made aware at the onset that the interview was part of the project which sponsored the enrollment of these adults in the classes. These are some of the factors which may have contributed to an overwhelming positive attitude toward handicapped adults, both before and after this experience.

About 98% of those asked felt that handicapped people should be in regular continuing education classes. The predominant theme here was that handicapped people should not be barred from a class "if they could handle it". However, 55% felt that handicapped people should be in special classes sometimes, "depending on the nature of the class and the degree of the handicap", and that sometimes regular classes might be too frustrating for some handicapped students.

Some suggestions made by respondents included insuring a balanced number of handicapped and non-handicapped students in a class. A particular

reference here was made to this individual's experience as the only non-handicapped student in her class. "It seemed unfair to the teacher. It seemed like I was getting a private lesson because the others did not always understand what was being taught". Another suggestion was that classes be pre-screened to ascertain the level of difficulty of courses. One student suggested that some of the non-handicapped students might want to know beforehand that handicapped students would be in class with them. This same student said that the handicapped students in her class did not interfere with anyone's learning. Additionally, she commented that if she had known that a handicapped student would be in her class, she would have enrolled anyway.

About 50% of those contacted said they experienced no change in attitude regarding handicapped adults, i.e., they did not feel more positively or more negatively. These respondents typically said "I've always had a positive attitude" or "I've never minded them". Sixteen individuals claimed to have become more "aware", "enlightened", or "understanding" as a result of this experience. No one reported any negative repercussions as a result of this experience.

The effect this project may have had on non-handicapped adults' attitudes toward handicapped people living in their community is difficult to ascertain. More than half of those contacted said that handicapped people should be able to live in the community. Again these responses may be part of individuals supplying socially appropriate answers. They may have been responding more to the notion allowing handicapped persons to live where they choose, rather than barring them, instead of to a more personal comment on how they might feel if handicapped people lived within their neighborhood.

In summary, this follow-up questionnaire seems to present strong evidence that the integration of handicapped adults in regular continuing education courses is an idea acceptable to a majority of continuing education students. Some of the factors which seemed to have contributed to the success of this project were: including facilitators as part of the classroom activities and enrolling handicapped students in small classes.

6/23/50

APPENDIX A

DRAFT

CONTINUING EDUCATION PROGRAM
FOR DISABLED ADULTS
TELEPHONE INTERVIEW FORMAT

Continuing Education Student/Teacher

NAME _____

My name is _____. I am a graduate student at the State University of New York at Albany. I am working with the program which supported the participation of handicapped adults in the Continuing Education course _____ _____
(name of course)
in which you were enrolled last spring/fall. Would you be willing to answer a few questions about the course and your feelings about the participation of handicapped adults in the course?

1. Were you aware that there was a handicapped person (or persons) in class?
____ yes ____no

2. What was your reaction to the participation of this (these) adult(s) in your class?

3. How do you feel the reactions of the other class members were?

4. Were you aware that a person (facilitator) was present to assist a handicapped person in your class? ____yes ____no

5. Were there any differences when this helper was not present to assist the handicapped person? ____yes ____no Better or worse?

6. Have you had any previous contact with handicapped adults? ___yes ____no

7. (If yes to #6) How has this experience influenced your ideas about handicapped people?

8. Were the handicapped adults in your class able to achieve the course objectives? ____yes ____no ____sometimes

9. Did participation of the handicapped adults interfere with the participation and learning of other students? ____frequently ____sometimes ____never (Get a degree of participation) (How many times did these kinds of things occur?)

10. Do you feel handicapped students should be enrolled in regular continuing education courses in the future? ____yes ____no ____sometimes

11. Do you feel handicapped students should have continuing education courses especially designed to meet their needs? ____yes ____no ____sometimes

12. Has this experience caused any changes in your thoughts about handicapped people living in your community? (Interviewer can evaluate whether this person has positive or negative thoughts on this issue without asking directly for opinion)

13. Do you think that handicapped persons should live in institutions?
____yes ____no ____sometimes

14. Do you think handicapped persons should take a more active part in community activities?
____yes ____no ____sometimes

15. Comments:

APPENDIX B

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONNAIRE

CASDA/CONTINUING EDUCATION

		Yes	Sometimes or Mixed	No	Unable to Say
1.	Awareness of handicapped	42		3	
2.	Reaction to	39	4		2
3.	Perceived reactions of others	32	9		4
4.	Aware of facilitator	40		4	1
5.	Presence of facilitator beneficial	26	5	2	12
6.	Previous contact with handicapped adults	20		23	2
7.	Handicapped able to achieve course objectives	25	10	8	2
8.	Did handicap[illegible] interfere		2	43	
9.	Should they be in regular continuing education classes	42	2	1	
10.	Should they be in special classes	1	25	19	
11.	Did this experience change attitude	6		26	13
12.	Should handicapped people live in the community	39		2	4
13.	Should they live in institutions	2	18	24	1
14.	Should they be active in community activities	40	4	1	

Interviewing to Date

Center	Course	No. Interviewed
Albany	Ceramics	3
Watervliet	Disco	2
"	Oil Painting	2
"	Ceramics	2
"	Typing	2
Schenectady	Cake Decorating	2
"	Photography	2
"	Stained Glass	2
"	Sewing	2
"	Disco	2
N. Colonie	Physical Educ.	3
"	Swimming	2
"	Disco	2
"	Pen & Ink Drawing	2
E. Greenbush	Disco	2
"	Guitar	2
"	Bird Ld.	1
"	Knitting & Crochetting	2
"	Volleyball	2
Guilderland	Disco	2
"	Yoga	2
"	Watercolors	2